

THE U.S. BACKS THE ARAB MONARCHS

The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Anti-Nasser Bloc

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THE visitor to Israel quickly discovers that events which loom large in the headlines abroad are not necessarily of prime concern to the inhabitants of this small but tough republic. Thus there has never been much interest here in the well-publicized peregrinations of Mr. Hammerskjold, let alone in the frequent pronouncements from his office on such subjects as the administration of the Gaza Strip, Egyptian control of the Suez Canal, or the intentions of Colonel Nasser. The infrequent deliberations of the Security Council do not as a rule rate very highly either; if the truth be told, the United Nations is reckoned an increasingly bad joke. Even such stalwarts of legalism as may still be found here and there among the older generation of Western-educated Israelis have quietly come round to the view that where Israel is concerned international law can be made to prevail only if the plaintiff enters the courtroom well armed and has a few reliable friends on the bench. The International Court at The Hague is of course exempt from these suspicions, but then it has no powers of enforcement.

There are indeed persistent rumors that

THE Eisenhower Doctrine, solidly backed by the Sixth Fleet, got its first trial in the recent Jordanian crisis, and seemed to produce results: a conservative bloc is now forming in the Middle East that may yet set limits to Nasser's overweening ambitions, and there is at least the prospect of American influence filling the void left by the withdrawal of the British—although, as GEORGE LICHTHEIM warns from Jerusalem, optimism about Middle East developments must always be heavily qualified. Mr. Lichtheim is a regular contributor on world affairs; his article "Why England and France Intervened" appeared in our December 1956 issue.

a judgment in Israel's favor as regards Suez might weigh with Colonel Nasser—but only because it may suit him to appear law-abiding for a change. The notion that Egypt genuinely intends to live up to the spirit of last October's "six principles" solemnly adopted by the Security Council strikes the Israelis as comical. This, not his alleged anti-Israeli bias, accounts for the pronounced lack of enthusiasm for Mr. Hammerskjold which one senses here. The Secretary General is not blamed for being polite to Colonel Nasser, but for enabling that gentleman to conduct his piratical operations in the guise of high-level international talks about "plans" and "proposals" which invariably turn out to be unilateral Egyptian statements of intent. In the Israeli view, it would be better to call a successful coup of brigandage by its proper name, instead of trying laboriously to legalize it: an opinion also shared by the British and French governments.

It was in a similar mood of semi-ironical detachment that public opinion here in recent weeks followed Washington's somewhat tortuous efforts to make the Eisenhower Doctrine rhyme with the Sixth Fleet's movements and the progress of the Richards mission. Israeli editorials were inclined to extract the last ounce of satisfaction from the spectacle of Washington's rapid descent from the moral heights climbed last November, when the mere idea of "using force" against anyone (let alone an Arab state) was solemnly abjured by the President and Mr. Dulles as one of those outdated "colonial" notions which only retrograde people could entertain. What has been happening since then appeals powerfully to the Israeli sense of humor, the more so since it was Britain and France rather than Israel who were the recipients of the seemingly end-

less flood of moralizing which in those weeks emanated from the White House and the State Department.

Most Europeans last fall, discounting the verbal idealism of the U. S. administration, promptly began to speculate on how long it would take America to step into Britain's shoes. Judging from the dramatic circumstances surrounding the Jordanian upheaval of April-May, the answer would seem to be: six months. Except of course that the British Foreign Office never hit on the bright idea of denouncing Colonel Nasser's interference in Jordan as a manifestation of "international Communism," while extolling the same Nasser's handling of the Suez dispute as a healthy display of "Arab nationalism." This tightrope act represents a distinct refinement upon Downing Street's traditional cunning: trans-Atlantic guile at long last catching up with the Old World model—what a subject for a future Henry James!

It is nice, too, after all these years of American sermonizing about effete monarchies and retrograde European ideas, to watch the United States busy propping up the last few remnants of Arab traditionalism, and even taking credit for helping young Hussein of Jordan to disband a rebellious parliament! If the opposition leaders in Jordan and Syria were not so destitute of political intelligence, they could make something of this cleavage between Washington's abstract republicanism and the grotesque promises showered upon Hussein for behaving like a latter-day Stuart monarch.

Not that everyone in this part of the world takes the prospect of "kingly government" very seriously, save as a temporary expedient. Although currently bereft of its parliament, Jordan still has its political parties (minus the Communists) and its semi-free press—unlike Egypt, where a more efficient regime has established complete uniformity. Even Iraq, after several years of royalist quasi-dictatorship, still conserves a parliament of sorts, safely packed, it is true, with loyal government supporters, but also containing a few gelded opposition

leaders who are allowed to make speeches (but not to raise the mob against the all-but-perpetual government of Nuri es-Said). As long as the army and the bureaucracy are prepared to back this state of affairs, there seems no reason why it should not endure. The middle class is weak, and part of it is beginning to benefit from Iraq's growing oil royalties.

Jordan under Hussein seems to be heading in the same direction (except for the absence of oil, which may turn out to be crucial). The choice—one wearies of having to repeat it—is not between democracy and dictatorship, but between old-fashioned royalist authoritarianism and new-fangled Nasserist rule by an army junta. The State Department's evident belief that royalism can still endure for a while is thus less unrealistic than its liberal critics tend to assume. One may marvel at the speed with which American diplomats and correspondents in these parts have become converts to monarchy, but the argument that this kind of regime suits the Arabs (or some Arabs) is not as absurd as it looks. Even some of the nationalist spokesmen in Jordan, and in the Old City of Jerusalem, on balance prefer their royal autocrat to Colonel Nasser and his band of fellow militarists.

THE uncertain element in this witches' brew is Arab nationalism; or rather Pan-Arabism. Every politician in the Arab world is now busy trying to sound like a national leader, and the head start gained by Nasser in this domain—thanks in part to the remarkable imbecility of the British government—still serves him in the race against his crowned and uncrowned rivals. But the others are beginning to catch up: when Hussein carried out his coup d'état in Jordan he promptly consolidated his popular support by broadcasting a proclamation in which he presented himself as a true servant of the Arab (read: Pan-Arab) cause.

Similarly, when in late April and early May he cracked down on his Communists—who by that time included officials and members of parliament—he denounced them

for maintaining ties with their fellow Communists in Israel. This proved a useful slogan. The conservative bloc which at present runs Iraq and Jordan—with some support from Saud who is still fairly safe in his oil-bearing desert—has found by experience that, to the unlettered, "Communism" is still a rather vague bogey, so that it is quite feasible to couple Communists and Zionists as twin enemies of true Arabism. This of course is gall and wormwood to the Communists who for years have tried to integrate themselves into the Arab national movement by joining the anti-Israel campaign.

It also embarrasses Nasser and his Syrian opposite number, Serraj, neither of whom can do without Communist support. By contrast it has a certain effect on the conservative wing of the national movement: and even left-of-center groups like the Ba'ath and the "National Socialists," who try to rope in Communist support without surrendering their own aims. No Arab likes to be thought a fool, and the assertion that Nasser and Serraj have sold out to Moscow, without getting anything substantial in exchange, is not without its effect on the bazaar politicians and the sages of the local coffee-house. Colonel Abdel Nasser is still a hero to most of them (except to the journalists and parliamentarians who know what has happened to political life in Egypt under his dictatorship), but his rivals have had some success in spreading the tale that more is to be got out of the West by subtler methods than his. ("The West" in this context signifies America plus Russia, since no Arab is so naive as to suppose that there exists a profound and unbridgeable gulf between these powers.) At any rate, it can today be said with some plausibility that Nasser no longer has a monopoly of Pan-Arab good will: there may even be something in the belief that he has passed his peak.

It is only by thus balancing long-term and short-term considerations that one can begin to do justice to the State Department's recent achievements. Anyone equipped with

the standard vocabulary of contemporary politics—the editor of the *New Statesman* for example—can demonstrate without much difficulty that it is futile and foolish for the United States to build upon such medieval relics as King Saud or the Hashemite dynasty in Baghdad and Amman. But in recent weeks such critics have proved less perspicacious than the routine diplomats who engineered the formation of the conservative bloc. It is instructive to compare their predictions with the realities, insofar as these can be perceived by a visitor with no particular axe to grind. Thus the *New Statesman*, which makes a habit of being systematically wrong about almost everything, had this to say on April 27 about the royalist coup in Jordan the week before:

What has the king achieved by this? Very little. His attempt to form a Bedouin-dominated cabinet—even if it survives, which now seems doubtful—is a paper compromise paralysed by internal contradictions. It lacks the will to control the Ba'ath-incited street mobs by force, and it is unwilling to carry out the reorientation of foreign policy which the king desires. Moreover, its formation does not solve Jordan's basic financial problem. It cannot appeal for American help, while Syria and Egypt are unlikely to go to bail for an administration which is working, even if unwillingly, against their own interests.

Within a few days every one of these confident predictions turned out to be nonsense. The combination of king, army, and traditionalists easily scattered the parliamentary leaders, while the "Ba'ath-incited street mobs" proved ready enough to cheer Hussein and damn his enemies. The "reorientation of foreign policy" was accomplished with such speed that it became unnecessary for the Richards mission to visit Amman. Nor are there any signs of reluctance to ask for American aid! Lastly, Egypt and Syria, having failed to overthrow Hussein, remained quiet while he used his Saudian and Iraqi connections to consolidate his military hold. When it came to the point, 80 per cent of the Jordanian army proved royalist, the chief malcontents among the officers escaped to Damascus, and the alleged

unreliability of the armored detachments—staffed, it was said, by too many ex-Palestinians from the West bank—had no marked effect on the situation. In short, royalist rule turned out to be entirely practicable—as indeed it has for years proved in Iraq.

All this of course means nothing in the long run, but statesmen have to busy themselves with a succession of short runs, and just now the attempts to split the Arab League into two rival blocs looks like a success. The important point in this context is that the conservative wing of the League—i.e. the three kings and their allies—have managed to retain their hold upon a sizeable fraction of Arab public opinion, such as it is. Their quarrel with Egypt and Syria is not viewed as a sell-out to “imperialism,” a term which in the Middle Eastern context still signifies Britain and France rather than the two super-powers. Not even Nasser has as yet dared to challenge Saud’s or Hussein’s standing as independent rulers; to do so would be to explode the League from within, and the time for that is not ripe.

Apart from the Communists, who of course have settled on the “Eisenhower Doctrine” as the symbol of the new imperialist threat to Arab freedom, no sizeable group in the Arab world is prepared to equate the United States with “imperialism” pure and simple. For to the Arabs “imperialism” has come to mean direct Western domination. It is all very well for the Communists to explain, with frequent reference to the sacred Leninist texts, that imperialism is simply monopoly capitalism in action. To the relatively unsophisticated minds of most Arab nationalists this kind of reasoning seems needlessly involved and obscure. They think they know what imperialism means, and so far Washington has given them no cause to suspect that the Eisenhower Doctrine is intended to stake out a claim for colonial domination by the United States. In the circumstances they see no reason why they should not profit from balancing between the two world power blocs.

None of this need be taken to mean that the conservative bloc can go on func-

tioning for a considerable length of time if it fails to make contact with Arab nationalism. Public opinion—which for practical purposes means middle-class and intelligentsia opinion—is becoming a force even in the Middle East. “National Socialist” (the term is almost meaningless) politicians like Hussein’s ex-Premier, Suleiman Nabulsi, are clearly regarded by the emerging middle class as true standard-bearers of the Pan-Arab cause. In order to survive, the royalist regimes must come to terms with them; but they can probably do so at their own speed and on their own terms. The chief practical effect of the Eisenhower Doctrine, the Richards mission, and the Sixth Fleet’s maneuvers has indeed been to stabilize these regimes sufficiently for just such a compromise to become feasible. By stemming the headlong rush toward Nasserism in the doubtful Jordanian area, these American interventions have created a political no-man’s-land which the more extreme forces of Pan-Arabism cannot enter unopposed, as they were threatening to do on the eve of the Jordanian coup. That is all, but measured by the usual pragmatic tests it is not entirely negligible.

IT COULD of course be nullified by some such stroke as a successful assassination in either Baghdad or Amman. But the mere fact that this now looks like the radical opposition’s only immediate hope of recovering the ground lost in recent weeks speaks volumes about the opposition’s real strength, when measured against the full force of the conservative bloc, backed by the Sixth Fleet and the promise of adequate financial aid. In Jerusalem at any rate, where Jordanian affairs are viewed in the light of pretty circumstantial knowledge, talk of the opposition leaders controlling the mob sounds hollow. Their control over the students and the restless refugees on the West bank is a function of their ability to make the Egyptian-Syrian orientation look more inviting than the rival alliance of the Arab monarchies; and this they have failed to do.

As for the Jordanian army, there is no good reason why it should exchange its tradi-

tional ties with Iraq—"the Prussia of the Arab world"—for an uncertain (financially and otherwise) alliance with Egypt (a deflated military power) and Syria (a non-existent one). If it is a question of marching against Israel—the only long-range goal of all these states that does not get them against each other—the unity of the conservative bloc offers better prospects than a loose formation under the leadership of the Egyptian Péron, with his hankering after personal hegemony over the Arab world. In short, the conservative bloc has its own program which is not necessarily less realistic than Nasser's.

In terms of Pan-Arab politics this disassociation of the Arab League into a conservative-royalist and a radical-Nasserist group means the end of Cairo's ambitious scheme to organize a camp of "liberated" and neutralist Arab states comprising Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Jordan. The last-minute attempt by President Kuwatly of Syria in late April to mediate between the two groups was a failure, largely because Syria is itself the arena of a struggle between conservative and radical movements, with Kuwatly fighting for his political life against radicals and Nasserist army officers.

By early May any idea of Syrian intervention in Jordan had been rendered impracticable by American-Turkish pressure in the north and Saudi-Iraqi troop movements in the south. (Egypt was forced to sit still anyhow, since Egyptian troops would have had to cross Sinai and the Negev in order to reach Jordan). For this failure Nasser has only himself to blame. The violence of his anti-Hussein campaign left the king no choice but to fight back with the weapons he had at hand, notably the Arab Legion. Something appears to have been at fault with Cairo's assessment of the relative strength of the contending factions in the country and within the Legion. When two ex-commanders of the force, Nuwar and Hajjari, absconded to Damascus within a week, the Cairo Junta seems to have jumped to the conclusion that the time was ripe for a repetition of its successful intervention

eighteen months ago, when Egyptian agents (and Saudian money) brought the mobs into the streets, overthrew the weak Jordanian government, and frustrated Britain's attempt to bring Jordan into the Baghdad Pact alliance of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan. This time the coup misfired—largely because there were no British to blame, and no obvious targets for "anti-imperialist" slogans. Besides, Saudian money was backing the conservative side, the Iraqis were ready to march, Turkey was making threatening noises in the north, and the Sixth Fleet was steaming through Mediterranean waters as a kind of general hint in the direction of Moscow.

This impressive backdrop to the relatively insignificant Jordanian crisis revealed the extent of the forces which could be brought into play under the terms of the Eisenhower Doctrine, but in itself it was no more than a display of strength intended to overawe the Cairo Junta and its Syrian allies. (Contrary to a widespread impression, Israel was sitting tight for good political reasons of its own.)

THE new Middle Eastern alignment thus wears two different aspects, depending on whether one concentrates on inter-Arab politics or adopts a less parochial standpoint. Leaving the Arab states out of account for a moment, Turkey is America's most important ally in the area, as well as being the most Westernized state of the group (Israel excepted) and a secular republic compared with which Nasser's Egypt looks distinctly retrograde. Thus it cannot be seriously charged that American policy has come to rely wholly on the backward Arab monarchies. It is only in terms of Arab politics that this complaint has some force, and for reasons already indicated it is not altogether valid here, since the conservative bloc is as nationalist as the rival Nasserist camp. It is a measure of Nasser's failure that his opponents in the Arab world have come together in the persons of the Saudi and Iraqi hereditary rulers, who have had to bury their long-standing family feud in order to form a common front against him. They

have done so in the shadow of the Baghdad Pact and the Eisenhower Doctrine—two of the Colonel's favorite bogies—and against a stimulating backdrop of Sixth Fleet movements and loud but hollow protests from Moscow, Cairo, and Damascus against American "intervētion." True, as a result, Cairo Radio no longer refers to Iraq, Saudi, and Jordan as "liberated" countries, but though intended as a deadly insult, this omission is far from fatal to the standing of the three hereditary rulers. (And if it is a question of radical versus traditionalist forces, it should be remembered that Cairo's relations with Tunisian Arab liberals and Turkish republicans have been consistently bad.)

The new alignment had been in the offing for some months. Its roots are to be sought in the losses suffered by Saudia and Iraq as a result of the temporary stoppage of oil supplies to Europe following the Suez operation. This upheaval persuaded the oil-producing Arab governments that Nasser was not merely a dangerous neighbor but a blundering megalomaniac whose restless activities represented a constant threat to their principal source of income. Thus while continuing to pay lip service to the "six principles"* laid down at the Cairo meeting of "liberated" Arab states last February (not to be confused with the Security Council's "six principles" on Suez, which have proved equally hollow), they began to look around for means to exclude Nasser from their

*What do these famous principles portend? As formulated on February 27, after a three-day wrangle between Colonel Nasser, King Saud, King Hussein and President Kuwatly of Syria, they obliged the signatories to work for (a) Israel's unconditional withdrawal from Gaza and Sharm-el-Sheikh; (b) restoration of "full rights" to the Arabs of Palestine; (c) compensation for Egypt in payment of damages and losses resulting from the Anglo-French Suez campaign; (d) Egyptian sovereignty over the Suez Canal; (e) a joint stand on "British aggression against Yemeni territory" (an ancient Saudian complaint arising from Saud's oil politics); and lastly (f) support for the Algerian nationalists. This could be described as a general platform of Pan-Arabism, its various planks being designed to please the four conferees, without committing them to anything in particular.

councils. The result so far has been the formation of the conservative bloc which is now trying to rope in nationalist (i.e. middle-class and intelligentsia) support on the basis of anti-Communism and continued (but somewhat academic) fulminations against Israel.

HAVING subscribed to the six principles, Saud and Hussein automatically qualified as fellow nationalists and rulers of "liberated Arab countries." They were thus in a position, some weeks later, to accept American aid without risking the dangerous imputation of being imperialist stooges. Taking arms and money from the West (or from Russia, for that matter) is not reckoned dishonorable in the Middle East, so long as the recipient can offer convincing proof that he has preserved his freedom of action in terms of local and regional politics; and in this respect there is little to choose between the two groups within the Arab camp. That one of them prefers to lean on Washington rather than Moscow does not render it suspect to the uncertain third factor: the Pan-Arab movement as such.

But the converse also holds: it is silly to suppose that Arab nationalism can be mobilized against one or the other of the Arab states on the plea that the local rulers have sold out to Russia or to "international Communism." Communism in the Middle East (as in the rest of the world) is national as well as international. It is by now a growing force (though not the dominant one) within the Arab nationalist movement, and its partners among the various left-of-center groups (Ba'ath, National Socialists, etc.) are certain to rally to its side in any open confrontation between the conservative bloc and the radical alliance which takes the form of ordinary anti-Communist suppression, military or otherwise. To that extent the elements of a "popular front" are already in existence, not only in Syria and Lebanon, but even in so backward an area as Jordan. (Lebanon incidentally is the only Middle Eastern country other than Israel where it is possible to encounter genuine trade union-

ism, and even a handful of people who are socialists in the Western sense of the term, i.e., neither fellow-travelers nor camouflaged fascists).

IT IS with such considerations in mind that Middle Eastern observers—in Israel and elsewhere—of the recent American moves tend to qualify the optimism engendered by the turn of events in April-May. When the “integrity and independence” of a petty kingdom like Jordan is officially declared to be “vital” to American interests, while at the same time Egyptian dictation is accepted at Suez, one may wonder whether the policy-makers have a clear sense of the relative importance of the issues at stake. And when “international Communism” is described as the true cause of Jordan’s troubles, the alarming thought suggests itself that those in authority who find it convenient to invoke this spectre have actually begun to believe their own propaganda. This does not matter in the case of someone like Hussein, who would anyhow find it difficult to tell the difference between a Communist and a typical middle-class politician like his “Na-

tional Socialist” ex-Premier Suleiman Nabulsi. But if Washington is going to use slogans of this kind, it should do so with a clear consciousness that they are nonsensical. There is perhaps no great harm in talking nonsense, as long as one is not taken in by one’s own verbiage. Otherwise the American argument is reduced to the sophistry of contending that Colonel Nasser is acting as an agent of “international Communism” in Jordan, while retaining the status of an authentic nationalist at home. Perhaps the whole confusion is due to the speed with which the Eisenhower Doctrine had to be invoked last April for the deployment of the Sixth Fleet. But now that the emergency is over—for the moment anyhow—the time has come to take another look at the official vocabulary. The cold war is, among other things, a struggle for the allegiance of doubtful and uncommitted political forces, and the verbal instruments employed in this task must do the work of precision tools. If they are blunted by careless or inexperienced handling, there is a danger that an increasingly sophisticated public will shop elsewhere for its favorite article.